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OLD WISCONSE

Arthur G. Leisman

OLD WISCONSE
and
OTHER POEMS



By Arthur G. Leisman

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TO the Wisconsin State School for the Deaf, through whose motherly devotion and guidance the paths of the world of silence have been lightened and glorified revealing fertile fields of endeavor to those who, like myself, have lost their hearing, this book is reverently dedicated.

We do our hearts a grievous wrong
If they do bleed with sorrow's prong;
Life's cup of joys and smiles and song
Are ours to share to make us strong,
And thus our youthful days prolong.

Old Wisconsin

O river beautiful, the poet's dream,
How dear the scenes along thy winding stream,
How sweet the soothing music as I lie
Beside thee, watching fleecy clouds go by.

What heart of man can fail to stir with thrills
When sunset rays enhance thy lofty hills,
And singing birds their garp of silence don,
While thou, O river, toileth on and on?

By thee the land with milk and honey flows,
And o'er thy boulders soft the zephyr blows
To fan the milkmaid in yon pastures green,
Where lowing herds and roaming sheep are seen.

I marvel still to think thy course is fraught
With tireless toil that scarce strips thee of aught,
When to vast fields the golden grain it brings
And to great mills the might of countless springs.

The things that feed the hunger of the soul
Are freely mine to share when oft I stroll
Along thy vales and breathe of spices sweet—
Nor care nor want to bind my buoyant feet.

Flow on, O river fair, and when no more
With thee I roam let me rest by thy shore,
That I may answer in the Final Test
I, too, in life have given of my best.

Trailing Clouds

Trailing clouds that come and go,
Adrift to ports of showers,
Ports that give life and with snow
In winter shield the flowers.

Fleecy white and silver-lined,
Like peonies in blossom—
Oh, how oft my heart has pined
To rest me on thy bosom.

Trailing clouds, what lovely scene
When at eve, gray and sombre,
Sunset rays lie all serene
On fleecy folds of slumber.

Trailing clouds, could I but fly
With thee to distant nowheres,
Gladly would I leave to lie
In furrows deep my ploughshares.

Trailing clouds, if far I flew
The gayer worlds discerning,
Shamed I'd feel to think how few
The joys I have been earning.

Love

Is it the flower so full of warmth
By yonder wayside stream?
Is it the scent of pine-clad hills
That filters through my dream?
Do birds on their light wing lure me
Still higher to life's goals,
And there to vanquish varying winds
Of failure's threat'ning shoals?
Perchance 'tis true, but of these things
I breathe a sweeter lay,
If in that love I see but you,
Dear heart, my Queen of May.

For God is love, and nature's things
Are gems sent from above
To teach the world through them to love
That which is due in love.
And ever since the world began
Lives have been sweetened still,
Like full-blown roses, where the path
With dewy love did fill.
And though that love is old, old,
It's ever new and young—
New and fresh to the youth and lass,
As though from sunrays wrung
At dawn of day, and whose bright eyes
With carefree laughter shine,
Whose hearts are joined in wondrous ties,
And so with yours and mine.

The Alumni

How dear to mem'ry's musing dream
Still lingers that June day,
When proudly from youth's silv'ry stream
We steered adown the bay,
With hoisted sails to morning's gleam
Flung high in grand array.

Ahead and stretching everywhere
Our waking eyes did see,
Unveiled ghostlike to visions fair,
The gray mist of life's sea;
But clear or foul the long wayfare
No keen mind could foresee.

Though parted our paths from the strand
Of school days hallowed still,
Refreshing scenes of yore shall stand,
Our daily life to fill
With promise that success at hand
Is ours where there's a will.

Oh, be it thus that Father Time
Shall find our fleet in state
Deep anchored in some fertile clime,
And there perpetuate
For each a credit to sublime
Our class at Heaven's Gate.

Keep Smiling

If you desire a message true
That shall make life worth while for you,
Keep smiling.

When on rough seas your course you ply,
When for success your aim is high,
Keep smiling.

If things are not what they should be,
If gloom o'er you sends harsh decree,
Keep smiling.

A grouch in misery has a berth
Who does not drink of bubbling mirth;
Keep smiling.

Great wealth oft brings unhappiness,
Be glad you have what you possess—
Keep smiling.

Think of the birds and their wee nest,
With simple life and songsters blest;
Keep smiling.

Spread smiles as on your way you go;
You've but one path to tread, you know—
Keep smiling.

For in this realm the life we live
Is measured by the things we give—
Keep smiling.

The Engagement Ring

The sky was blue, the birds were gay,
And singing brooks through night and day
Of care and want scarce knew.
The flowers were fresh and full of bees;
From bush and hill and orchard trees
The winds their fragrance blew.
'Twas May, and beauty filled your eyes,
When youthful heart found heart and sighs
Were breathed of love for you.

Then summer came with month of brides
When loving heart in tune abides
With lark and swift and sky.
The hills, the stars, the moon and streams
All wrought for me bright rosy dreams,
Unseen yet mused by eye
That saw love worlds the stars among,
And filled with life from heartstrings wrung
Of sweeter vows spoke I.

Soon came the time of falling leaves
When o'er yon fields of golden sheaves
Loud blew the winds of north.
We met once more and saw with pain
Red roses fall, but gay again,
As rays through clouds shoot forth,
Swift came the dreams of future's bliss,
Where nothing fades from thrill of kiss
Nor frost can sting love's worth.

Astride the winds now falls the snow;
'Tis winter time, and bright the glow
 Of warmth around the hearth.
Of you I dream the evening long,
And gather gems to weave a song
 Of love that knows no dearth.
Oh, storm and cold can leave no score
On wings of love that skyward soar
 To grander worlds than earth.

Though seasons come and seasons go,
The stars that light the earth below
 Unchanged remain in sky;
And since my love is love of star,
No wane of time, no winter's bar
 'Twixt you and me can lie.
It weaves its loom at eve of day,
And still at work when dawn is gray,
 Of strength it grows—and why?

Oh, words can't tell the reason why;
For might of tongue and pen I sigh
 To speak the thoughts of heart.
You are the Star of Life to me
And hope of hopes you live to be,
 To guide me on, sweetheart.
The sea is joined in wondrous blue
Where dips the sky, and so from you
 My love can never part.

Around the stars the ring of moon
In golden hue unveils the boon
 That ardent wooings bring.
With fonder dreams my heart aglow

Unceasing burns, till now I know
'Tis time my boon to spring.
Come then, my love, and snug in arms
Accept from me the gift of charms—
Love's sweet engagement ring.

I am so Happy

I am so happy, so happy am I,
I want to shout my rapture far and wide,
My heart is bursting and my tongue is tied—
I feel like singing, oh, yet it does seem
That my emotions are as stored-up steam,
Unwilling to escape with what it's blest
For fear its strength be weakened, and my breast
Swells like the surging sea and like the sea
I'm happier, really, than you'll ever be;
Shall I tell you the reason why?

My love has set the day, that's why,
And she has promised me her heart, her all,
Where once I feared there dwelt a doubtful wall
'Twixt us—so comely is she, and I but one
Of many who wooed her, and now I've won!
And she is to be mine—mine for aye,
To love and by her loved in turn each day.
Let all the bells their sounding hammers chime,
For now each morrow nearer brings the time,
And I'm so happy, so happy am I.

The Old Home

The old home stands alone in the vale,
It's snowbound and so cold, but still dear;
The roof cracks with the frost, the winds wail,
No smoke curls from the flues to bring cheer.
And the voice that I hear in the gloam
Is the thump of my heart in sad plea—
The loved ones have all gone and the home
Is left bare to the world and to me.

The old life is no more and the flow
Of the years does not serve to erase
And forget the dead embers and low,
When I long the old paths to retrace.
But hark! The old love is still here
And to crown a new home it has grown,
For the call comes to me, soft and clear,
From a heart to a heart of its own.



Your Mother was my Mother, Jim

I.

Two brothers, loved and ever true,
The parting paths of life did view;
In court they stood to bid farewell,
And one had heard the doleful knell
Of freedom's day for years and years,
And one who fought against vain tears
And knew naught could the law revoke
Braced up at last with strength and spoke:

"Your mother was my mother, Jim,
And though dark thoughts before me swim
That speak the anguish of my heart,
When hand grips hand ere you depart,
My love for you, O brother dear,
Will shine unstained throughout each year
That for a crime, as old as Mars,
You must now spend behind the bars.

"I know how deep your grief is, Jim;
You did the crime just for a whim,
And never realized till too late
That Truth at all time rules your fate.
But warmest love can not be torn
From bondage which of mother born
Abides with us until death calls,
And mightier is than prison walls.

“Fear not, but think of mother’s name
That must bear no eternal shame;
She lived for us, to her we owe
A stainless life—go brother, go
Where sins atoned are freed of weight,
Like clouds releasing from their height
Dark burdens washed and cleansed with rain
Till purer skies reveal their gain.

“And back home till you are set free,
I’ll wait for you and few will be
The days when righteous ties shall meet
In clash with worldly self-conceit,
And fail to stand each scornful blow
Of social pride and rank; for though
Grief fills my heart’s cup to the brim,
Your mother was my mother, Jim.”

II.

The other smiled and on his face
Like waking dawn the marbled trace
Gave way to glow of pink and life;
And deep’ning still in turmoiled strife,
Dark visions rose and smote his mind
Till they, too, died and peace did wind
Its downy vines around his heart,
And loosed his tongue to thus impart:

“As to a man in desert sun
Who reels and gasps and staggers on,
There looms to stay his waning pith
A fertile turf and life therewith,
Your words, beloved, have touched me so
And tapped the rocks of crushing woe,

Through which came gurgling faith and main
To quench the thirst and clear the brain.

“I did not know that love would cling
As vines enchained to lattice bring
Green garps to clothe the ugly scars,
And match their scales with silver stars.
I did a wrong which should beget
Deep shame—and here you love me yet!
How true the hearts in lasting stays
Of mother’s love that scarce decays!

“I feel the clutch of handcuff’s cold,
That through your words no terror hold;
To prove my worth I will not fail,
But cheerful aye the Holy Grail
You offered me will ease the woe,
And for you, dear, my love will grow
And shine as sunrays in the cell—
My tongue fails me, and so farewell.”

III.

“Farewell, and evermore if aught
Does try the soul, embrace this thought,
Snow-white and pure as love of Him,
Your mother was my mother, Jim.”



The Sea

I have not seen thy waste of foam, O sea,
I have not heard thy angry roar
When thunders roll and breakers from their spree
Are lashed to fury on thy shore.
But, oh, the thought of thee in times of woe
Has oft sustained me through the night
Of storm, till I in morning's peaceful glow
Emerged the stronger for my plight.

I have not seen thy placid surf, O sea,
Thy wheeling gulls and flapping sails,
Nor felt sweet zephyrs blow a kiss to me
Of savored charm when calm prevails.
But, oh, the thought of thee spurs me to rest,
As mortals should from toilsome days,
To loll and bask in whate'er we are blest,
And gather strength for new assays.

I hear thy music when I am alone
And thinking, thinking of a heart
That's mine no more, for its sad soothing tone
Seems of my lonely soul a part.
I fain would come and live with thee, O sea,
Forever ride thy billows gay,
But nay, man's life is brief while thou art free
To sing and play and toil for aye.

Lincoln County's Own

All hail to thee, the living brave,
The sons we gave the flag to save,
And now returning, heart to heart—
Beloved twicfold, of us a part.
Hail! Hail! We welcome thee
With open arms and joyful glee.
Home! Home! From war's surcease
Into the dawn of blissful peace—
Lincoln County's Own.

Heads bowed to thee, the sleeping brave;
The priceless laurels on thy grave
Are prayers from our hearts of woe,
For pride tells us we loved thee so.
And though in vain thy voice we hear,
No more to feel thy lips so dear,
Through tears we see the silver sheen
Of praise for those beneath the green—
Lincoln County's Own.

Shine forth, O sun, ere end of day
Thy gladness bring; each arrowed ray
Against the passing storm fling high—
Lo! A rainbow in the sky!
Awhile it gleams with triumph's light,
Then fading with approach of night
Gives way to gems of lasting hue,
Each star a name in field of blue—
Lincoln County's Own.

The Barred Arrow

On every street the arrows flame,
Flushed with the Thirty-second's fame;
In scarlet letters they proclaim
The goad that drove the foe to shame.

In divers ways the arrow brings
A wider scope than war and kings:
The home in town or country rings
With welcome, pride, and joyful things.

The father says, "This arrow long
Foretells my son, now manly, strong,
In learning clad to scorn the wrong,
Will rise to live in prose and song."

The mother's bosom swells to say,
"The arrow shows God's gracious way
Of speeding home from far away
The boy for whom she prayed each day."

Her curls dolled up, the sister weens,
"This shaft denotes a race for queens."
The brother says, "It simply means
Our Yankees spilled the kaiser's beans."

And modest still, up speaks sweetheart:
"This arrow straight is truly art—
From round the world, like sunrise dart,
It brings my lover, heart to heart."

The Liberty Loan

Rally! Rally! Buy a bond!
Shell the Hun with your mon!
Back your son with a gun!
Cries are heard from o'er the pond:
"Clear the way! Clear the way!
We will stay, fight the fray,
If you back us with a bond!"

Men of action, loyal blood,
Give your all, howe'er small;
They who fall give their ALL!
What a war and hell, O God!
Can it be we must see
Nations free fall and flee
From heels that are iron-shod?

Rally! Rally! Buy a bond!
Come on in—hear war's din!
We must win with our kin!
Send the word across the pond:
"We are there! We are there!
In our lair proud and fair
Hangs the flag of Purchased Bond!"

The Parting Smile

The time has come when we must part,
To worlds unknown I go, sweetheart;
A spotless name I seek to gain—
Till then I'll come to you again.
Let not your heart be sad, but grown
In love still wait for me alone,
And while with you I am close by,
Give me a smile for which I sigh.

The voice of manhood calls for me
To draw my fortune on life's sea;
Your love for me shall be the star
To lead me on to goals afar.
But ere I leave you, maiden fair,
Give me a smile, a smile so rare,
For through my toils a parting smile
Means deeper love, devoid of guile.

Let me just for a day lie in meadows green,
Alone and away from my clan—
Dreaming and lolling and drifting with lazy clouds
As they trail o'erhead like sails in a sea of blue—
At peace with God and at peace with man!

The World of Silence

If to the sound of things my ears are closed,
And to me music's soulful charm is lost,
I shall not like the moaning breezes be,
But thank my stars that I have eyes to see.

If mother's songs are not for me to hear
And lull to sleep each little childish fear,
Snug in her arms I shall no dread surmise,
But watch the lovelight deepen in her eyes.

If baby's crooning beckons sweet and low
To hearts that stir and with pure richness flow,
The tiny clutch of chubby fingers white
Upon my own shall give me rare delight.

If men of note from pulpits sway the crowd,
And I can grasp no word, however loud,
I can beset myself with books to read
And live with those who have sown wisdom's seed.

If filled with fluent thoughts I cannot face
And bring from grateful throngs their silver praise,
I can at least command the trenchant pen,
And stir the thousands from my little den.

Oh, there are things one should be grateful for,
E'en though he does his grievous plight deplore;
The heart that laughs to scorn all kinds of woe
Shall see no parting day or sunset glow.

THE THREE WISE MEN

(A Chapter From Ben Hur)

It was now the beginning of the third watch, and at Bethlehem the morning was breaking over the mountains in the east, but as the first rays of the sun came over the hills, the darkness of the night was still upon the city. The people were still asleep, and the streets were silent. The only sound that came from the city was the low murmur of the wind as it passed over the hills. The first rays of the sun came over the hills, and the darkness of the night was still upon the city. The people were still asleep, and the streets were silent. The only sound that came from the city was the low murmur of the wind as it passed over the hills.

The Three Wise Men

On snowy camels three wise men afar
O'er desert stretches journey long ago,
Where to the East in brilliant hue aglow
They saw with shrewd forethought the guiding star
That led them on and on, and naught did mar
The patience of them whose beards white as snow
Had grown in faith, till in the manger low
They found that which they came to seek so far.

We, too, are as the three wise men of old,
When o'er life's path an aim we seek to gain.
The star we follow will from us withhold
Scarce of the best if to that goal with main
We pin our faith and in our efforts mold
A patience that does not test us in vain.

Friendship

The hour was dark and life seemed naught,
Misfortune came to me unsought,
And friendless I knew not where to go,
Till in a home I saw aglow
The fires of warmth and kindness true;
I knocked for then childlike I knew
That such a home was built of cheers
To soothe the pain and dry the tears:
The walls outside had vines thereon
Of love that knows no setting sun.
And worn and torn by grief I prayed
That here at last a stranger strayed
Could find kind hearts at least a gain
Where golden dreams had been in vain.

The door oped; lo, a maiden fair!
All smiles was she as she stood there—
Rosecheeked, with lips that knew no shame,
So sweet and pure as though she came
Out from the land where lilies bloom
And weave love through the garden's loom.
She was the poet's queen of May,
A girl to crown each tuneful lay,
And like the stars of summer skies
In sparkling laughter shone her eyes.
Entranced, I felt the balm of peace
Enlight my heart the pain to ease,
And slowly through the dawning gleam
Once more I saw Sir Launfal's dream.

Ah then, 'twas she who bade me in,
And warmed my heart with smiles that win,
And gave me food and drink and rest
And saw to it that I felt my best
Ere I left; high above that night
The stars ne'er seemed so gay and bright
To eyes that, blurred with thankful tears,
Saw what they had not seen for years:
The rainbow's dip of one's wild dream
Does not exist along life's stream,
But glimmers in the heart of friend,
And brighter grows as days extend,
And like the Guiding Star of old
At last reveals love's pot of gold.

Lost

Hours ago in my heart it held sway:
That rare joy was as keen as each ray
Of the sun on green hillsides at dawn,
But now—it is gone! It is gone!
And I hunt! I hunt! I hunt!
Where, oh, where can it be?

Love once came to my heart and it sang
Of deep seas on whose reef the surf rang,
Of gay sails by sweet zephyrs blown,
But now—it is flown! It is flown!
And I hunt! I hunt! I hunt!
Where, oh, where can it be?

The Call of the Hills

Come one and all, let us away—
For us the hills are calling
With welcome sweet, enthralling;
Done are the toils of yesterday,
So let us from endeavors
Hie to the fresh'ning rivers
And build anew our earthly clay.

Come one and all, let us away
From smoke and filth and buildings
Out into God's blue gildings,
And there aside our burdens lay.
Are you to work so fettered
That to be newly bettered
In life to you is strange assay?

Come one and all, the hills today
Are calling, calling clearer,
And hearts that list are nearer
To God, for, man, the hills hold sway
The sceptre of youth-giving,
Of strength and sturdy living,
That will extend your life's pathway.



In Northern Wisconsin

My heart's gone to the hills with a bound
When the arbutus sweeten the air,
And I hear the wild call of the stream.
I hunt, and the woodlands resound
With the flight of the deer from its lair,
But I chase till fulfilled is my dream.

The wild aisles with rare spices enfold
And release from dark burdens' restraint
The heart's freedom wherever I roam.
I come, and I go, and behold
Scenes serene that ne'er artist could paint
In the north of Wisconsin, my home.

Birthday

Thy birthday, love, and still young and gay,
Rosecheeked and in the bloom of May!
Thy eyes speak of love entrancing sweet,
And thy scarlet lips, I fain would repeat,
Ne'er looked so tempting and at their best,
With honey dripping from kisses pressed.
O love, I would that I had the power
To paint thee like a deep-hued fragrant flower,
But nay, none to match thy beauty could try,
For this day thou art mistress of earth and sky.

Spring

Spring is here, love, gentle spring is here,
But in vain thy kindly voice I hear;
Spring has come, love, and my quivering tongue
Yearns to speak the vows that dormant hung
Through forsaken hopes and useless woe,
When hearts once gay felt the cold winds blow—
Winds of envy, ill winds, stinging sharp,
That so chilled and dulled love's vibrant harp.
Bare and dark as trees, devoid of life,
Aching hearts could find in our long strife
Naught of healing solace, for it seems
Deathless love somewhere, somehow still gleams.

Trees are budding, love, and birds are here;
From green-crested hills the calling clear
Comes of love newborn, of mad'ning streams,
And the song they sing with laughter teems.
All the world is buoyant, young and gay,
And my longing heart is borne away
To the scenes of mem'ry's sweet refrain
Where in yesteryear we knew no pain.
Love, let us forget the heart-pierced thorn,
And with spring-like youth our hearts adorn;
Come, I wait for thee, dear one, to shine
Forth the smile of hope forever mine.

Four Things

If I were to pick the thing I love
As foremost in my heart,
I'd swear to all the stars above
That thing is your dear heart.

If I were to tell my second guess,
It's for the hours I spend
With you to come again and bless
The love that knows no end.

If I were frank with my next say,
My tongue would ask but this:
That you and I be true for aye—
The surest road to bliss.

And lastly, my wish would fain impart
What makes my life worth while;
It sweetens all the dreams of heart—
The sunshine of your smile.

And what is so rare as a day in June?
Sang the poet of long ago;
And I would say:
And what is so sweet as hearts beating in tune
To the love that binds them so
On that rare day?

Blueberries

Bent with their weight in clusters blue,
Like morsels from the sky,
On downy moss they lie;
With marshy loam and heaven's dew,
The berries garp their wealth and strew
Afar the truth for man to view,
Where evergreens link blue with blue,
That God with us is nigh.

The blue above, the blue below,
And man between is free
To live as life should be.
We are but mortals and must grow
In body that by toiling so
For food, e'en if by bending low,
The soul to sweeter rest will go
In blue eternity.

Evening

When shadows o'er the meadows creep,
Gathering deep;
When violets close their petals blue,
Star-kissed with dew,
And worn I stand on sunset's hill,
Lonely and still,
My thoughts are like ships on the sea,
Drifting to thee.

The Prairie River

God be with thee, O river free,
And stay the axman's hand;
From wanton deeds of selfish greeds
Spare thee thy maples grand.

In gardens fair, of fragrance rare,
Thy priceless beauty lies—
By nature reared, by man endeared
Whose love for God ne'er dies.

Thy trees I love, thy skies above,
Thy boulders, weird and gray,
That blithely lift the foaming swift
Where rainbows leap and play.

Sweet thoughts divine, O river mine,
Are woven in thy stream:
That toiling still, o'er rock and hill,
Brings fortune to one's dream.

God be the might by which thy flight
E'ermore may court the sea;
With beauty rife long be thy life—
Unceasing, laughing, free.

Snow



Snow, snow, fall gently, feathery snow,
Rest me in sleep with thy winter's blanket and low
To earth a promise of watchfulness tenderly blow;
My heart's aweary of toilsome strife and woe.

Long have I labored through summer's day and deep
Beneath thy spread let me rest the reward to reap,
Till the dawn of wakeful spring through my soul does creep,
And I infused with bucyancy rise from my sleep.

Snow, snow, fall gently, feathery snow,
My heart's aweary of toilsome strife and woe.





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